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Rep. Dent addresses national anti-poverty advocates, vows fight for community block grant funding

WASHINGTON, D.C. — U.S. Rep. Charlie Dent (PA-15) today addressed the National Community Action Foundation's (NCAF) annual Legislative Conference in Washington, D.C. The NCAF represents the nation's 1,100 community action agencies, which utilize federal Community Service Block Grants (CSBG) to serve low-income individuals. Congressman Dent is a leading proponent of maintaining CSBG funding to equip people with the skills and resources necessary to rise out of poverty.

The text of Congressman Dent's remarks:

"Thank you for the warm welcome this morning. I want to express my sincere gratitude to Alan Jennings, the Executive Director of the Community Action Committee of the Lehigh Valley, or CACLV, in Pennsylvania, which is located in my district. He and his staff have tirelessly worked to serve people in need throughout the Lehigh Valley.

"I also would like to thank David Bradley, Executive Director of the National Community Action Foundation, for the invitation to deliver a few words at this conference. David's energetic and enthusiastic dedication to and advocacy for social service programs over the last thirty years has made it possible for organizations like CACLV to raise the quality of life for millions of low and moderate income Americans across the country.

“Finally, I would like to take a moment to thank all of you who take part in the daily operations of Community Action Agencies across the country. Fourteen million low income Americans have access to job training and education, nutritious food and quality homes as result of the programs administered through your Agencies.

“As Alan mentioned, in this Congress I was elected as one of the co-chairs of an organization called the Tuesday Group. The Tuesday Group is an interesting thing—we are a group of common sense, eclectic Republicans — some are moderate and some are conservative or a combination of both — who care a lot about many of the issues that are so near and dear to you. We work hard as to make sure domestic discretionary priorities, like CSBG, are valued.

“Today, approximately 37 million individuals and 17 percent of all children in the United States live in poverty. Across the country, the staff, board members and volunteers of 1,100 Community Action Agencies stand on the front line of our fight against poverty. In the 15th District of Pennsylvania, I witness the fruit of this initiative funded with the help of federal social service programs like the Community Service Block Grant.

“The Community Action Committee of the Lehigh Valley remains steadfast in its mission to improve the ‘quality of life for families in the Lehigh Valley by building a community in which all people have access to economic opportunity, the ability to pursue that opportunity, and a voice in the decisions that affect their lives.’ CACLV staff, board members and volunteers have engineered this mission to ensure low income area residents have access to basic necessities.

“For example, the Second Harvest Food Bank of the Lehigh Valley continues to partner with local agencies and school districts to ensure the most at risk children and families receive access to nutritious meals. I applaud the CACLV’s partnership with the Lehigh Valley Coalition on Affordable Housing. Together they have garnered thousands of dollars in financial support for area homeless shelters. In addition, CACLV has been instrumental in ensuring that hundreds of low income local families have properly weatherized homes — by insulating attics and basements, weather stripping doors and windows, and even replacing outdated appliances with the assistance of companies like PPL.

“Community Action Agencies, like CACLV, play an intricate role in equipping adults with the skills to rise above economic hardship. CACLV has taken a proactive measure to offer adults interested in entrepreneurial opportunities

a series of Start Your Own Business Classes. Students are schooled by volunteer professionals in beginning a new business or expanding an existing establishment. Nineteen new small businesses have been started in the Lehigh Valley as a result of this initiative.

“In order to ensure the families of the Lehigh Valley and throughout the country have access to these programs, crucial federal programs like the Community Service Block Grant, LIHEAP, and Head Start must be preserved. Congress successfully restored CSBG in the Continuing Resolution for FY 2007 at \$630 million.

“Once again, the program has been zeroed out of the President’s FY 2008 budget proposal. However, Congressman English, Congressman Baird, Congressman Hodes, and I are asking for our colleagues’ support to not only restore CSBG but fund the program at not less than \$700 million. In addition, Congress also appropriated nearly \$2 billion for LIHEAP and \$6.9 billion for Head Start for FY 2007. I believe it is crucial that we continue funding programs like these that will equip adults and children with the tools they need to embrace a prosperous future.

“Through our cooperative efforts, we can provide our most vulnerable populations of this country with the necessary resources to achieve greater economic opportunity.”

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